

DRAFT

*A Family
Story is a
Gift*

A GUIDE TO
SAVING FAMILY
STORIES

After the Great Hurricane Katrina in 2005, a man returned to his home and waded through the mud and debris. But his face reflected happiness not sorrow when he saw a small floating chest. He opened it and saw that his photos, coins, and writings were intact. He said, "I lost my home but I have my photos and stories."

A Family Story is a Gift is based on a 2005 publication with the goal is to persuade, nudge, and challenge everyone to ask questions about the life experiences of parents, grandparents, great-grandparents, veterans, and community elders and to record and preserve those memories and stories.

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**When you gather a family story and share it,
you give a priceless gift for generations to come.**



A Family Story is a Gift

Use this guide to get started gathering family stories or build on what you have.

Leaf through the guide and then develop a plan and strategy to save your family stories.

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Gather Your Stories Before It Is Too Late

How often have you said to yourself, “I must take time to learn more about my great-grandparents,” or “I have been meaning to talk to my parents and grandparents about their lives when they were young. . . .” “One of these days I will. . . .”

All through our lives we hear and enjoy family stories, but too often we don’t make a record of the story. We look at photo albums and talk about the picture of great-grandmother on horseback and funny experiences with Thanksgiving dinner, but forget to label the photos or write the stories. The years pass by, and we find that the storytellers have gone.

Younger generations find gathering stories and taking photos are talents they can share with older generations.



“Grandpa, can you tell me about your teen years? Did you have a car?” A member of Generation Z makes a call to her great-grandfather to ask a question about the past that just might influence her future. They started talking and shared experiences and ideas with the result, new stories about her family. She told her grandfather that she put the stories in the cloud. Then she texted the experience to her cousins and they agreed that this Thanksgiving they would have lots of questions for their great grandparents.

A Family Story is a Gift seeks to create stronger connections among generations in two ways: through the sharing of family stories by older family members and learning new ways of communicating from younger generations.



What Is Your Generation?

Greatest Generation: Born before 1922

Veterans/GI Gen: Born 1922-1945

Boomers: Born 1946-1964

Generation X: Born 1965-1980

Generation Y: Born 1981-2000

Generation Z: Born 2000 - present

Scott McFarland, executive director, *Serve Illinois Commission* and Dr. John Holton, *Concordia University Center for Gerontology* are chairs.

Members include Peggy Luce, *Luce Consulting*; John Hosteny, *Corporation for National and Community Service*; Louis Kosiba, *Illinois Municipal Retirement Fund*; Melinda LaBarre, *Illinois State Board of Education*; Pat Bearden, *American Family History Institute*; Dr. Darlene Ruscitti, *DuPage Regional Office of Education*; Jacqui Moreno and Eduardo Brambila, *Illinois Student Assistance Commission*; Joyce Gallagher, *Chicago Area Agency on Aging*; Tony Pierce, *Heaven's View Christian Fellowship*; Jenne Meyers, *Chicago Cares*; Jonathan Lackland, *Illinois State University*; Jennifer Reif, *Illinois Department on Aging*; Fred Nettles, *Partner For Hope Program, Illinois Dept. of Human Services*; Doug Brauer, *Richland Community College*; Onie Riley, *African-American Family Commission*; Brandon Bodor, *Second Front Systems and Franklin Project Ambassador, Aspen Institute*; Matthew John Rodriguez, *P-20 Council and Illinois PTA*; Isabella Martinez and Jacqueline Martinez, *Netwings*; Natalie Furllett, *Illinois Campus Compact*; Arthur Sutton, *Illinois Board of Higher Education*; Nisan Chavkin, *Constitutional Rights Foundation Chicago*; Rosie Drumgole, *Volunteer Connectors and Chicago Cares*; Susan Drone, *Illinois Community College Board*; Mark DePue, *Abraham Lincoln Presidential Library*; Jenne Meyers, *Chicago Cares*; Bernie Wong, *Chinese American Service League*, Kelia Beck and William Coussens, *Serve Illinois Commission*; Jacqueline Martinez, *Netwings*; and Dr. Jane Angelis, *Continuance Magazine*



About Family Stories

As a nation, we value our family stories because they connect the past to the present and often give us direction for the future. Throughout the long history of our country, the role of family has been central to the strength and resourcefulness of the community. The stories of families and their contributions to one another are the threads that have woven the fabric of American democracy.

Family stories focus on life passages, victories and defeats, and memories that are meaningful. The hallmark of family stories leads to the questions that younger generations might ask about places: **migration**; civic involvement: **volunteering and service**; life events: particularly **school and work**; and **family and community gatherings**: celebrating and remembering.

Migration Everyone Came from Someplace



Students and members of Gen Y examine a poster about the migration patterns to Illinois. “My ancestors came from Italy” said Claudia. Her classmate responded, “My grandparents migrated from Mexico long before I was born.”

Every American is descended from ancestors who came from another country or continent. Even Native Americans, many of whom have lived in North America for 10,000 years, originally came across the Siberian peninsula.

“Over the past 200 years, nearly 50 million people have left their homelands to live in the U.S. This has been the greatest movement of people from one place to another in world history. Someone in your family was probably among them” (Do People Grow on Family Trees?).

Pat Bearden, a family historian, describes a photo that has been passed down from generation to generation. The photo has been patched and stapled and repaired. She said, "It is precious to me because it represents my past. On my father's 85th birthday I asked him about my family history. He was cantankerous and said, 'Why do you want to know that?' I said, 'Because it's about me!'



Bearden, coauthor of *History Comes Home* tells about the migration of her family and her roots--African, Native American, and Irish. In her Chicago Public Schools classroom, she shared pictures of her great-grandmother Fredonia and other ancestors, some who were light skinned, some dark, some in-between.

When asked, "Aren't you afraid of what you might find?" Bearden said, "Yes, I was afraid." She continued, "No, I'm not afraid now. We all have skeletons in our family closets. We all have things in our past that we would rather not have happened. But here we are. This is a celebration! Wherever we are from and whatever we've been through, it's just who we are. The more we look back, the more we can say, 'Wasn't that something?'"

"Remember your roots, your history, and the forebears' shoulders on which you stand."

Marion Wright Edelman

Volunteering and Service

Teach For America AmeriCorps members serve students and schools throughout the country. Their family histories will focus on stories about their service, particularly incidents that made them understand their contribution.



One of the characteristics of American democracy is the sense of community and neighbors helping neighbors. Volunteers are everywhere, in schools, communities, the workplace, giving something of themselves and often saying, “I get more out of this than I give.” Some of the most memorable family stories feature the spirit of service when neighbors helped neighbors in with daily needs and in time of crisis.

The service of veterans is a story for many families. WWII was an extraordinary time when a nation came together to support the war effort. Although fewer than 1 percent of citizens serve in the military today, in WWII roughly 10 percent of all Americans served. The desire for more young people to have a national service experience has produced new momentum toward AmeriCorps and National Service.

The stories about Veterans from all wars continue to be touchstones for understanding American history.

Learning and Work



Students from the Lake County Tech Center represent a variety of occupation programs that encompass career pathways and work-based learning. Local business and service partnerships provide a smooth connection from learning to work.

What was your first job? What were your responsibilities? Did you know what you wanted to do when you finished school? Did you have a part time job as a teen? When generations reflect on the changes in the classroom and the workplace, the questions and answers help generations understand work traditions. Teachers professors and business leaders agree that communication skills – interviewing, listening, writing, reading – the same skills used for gathering family stories and important to success in school and preparation for a career.

When older family members talk about work, they also bring stories about work ethic that was often a strong motivator in their careers. Elders have many ideas that provide their view of success and failure: “I always got to work on time.” “Obstacles are opportunities in disguise.” “There is no failure except no longer trying.”

Family and Community Gatherings

Everyone loves a good story, particularly when it is about a family tradition or ancestor that might be memorable or tainted with scandal. So when families congregate, it is a golden opportunity to explore family roots, ask questions about memories of great-grandparents and older family members, their talents, work, ideas, and values. If the stories are written, they will be remembered from generation to generation.

Community organizations including faith groups, clubs , sports, recreation, and other entities also gather from time to time for socialization, sharing a pot luck or making plans. Many of these events are based on how communities work together, solve problems and create traditions. Many communities have history groups that record the progress and call attention to historic buildings, parks and local traditions often based on family and community stories.



As the family celebrates a birthday and anniversary, the cousins sitting on the fence ask their grandparents, "Why is your birthday and anniversary on the same day?" Their replied, "We couldn't get married until I was 18, so when the day came, we celebrated my birthday by getting married."

Getting Started with Family Stories



A college student serves his community by creating a community mural. He asked older community members to recall stories about the early days and then transformed the story into art.

Five Ways to Get Started

1 Set a date for getting started

1 Today is a good day to plan your strategy with other family members. Think about a way to begin today, tomorrow, on Thanksgiving or a coming holiday celebration--before the end of 2016.

2 Think about the questions

2 Send an email, text message, or make a phone call with a question or two to get started.

3 Plan how you will record the story

3 Use your phone or other recording device with plans to produce written accounts of the stories.

4 Share with other family members

4 Start a family story blog or Twitter account or YouTube journal to record and share progress.

Ask and answer questions

5 Decide on the process for story gathering: asking questions, recording answers, and verifying the information. Older family members may need help with social media but the younger generations have that expertise.

Preparing Questions

There are many ways to prepare questions for collecting family stories. The time line on the following page can provide a check list. Likewise other family members may have questions.



The Internet is a great resource. For example, Story Arts suggests five categories of questions: Places To Remember, People To Remember, Life Events, Objects, Important Transitions. <https://www.storyarts.org/classroom/roots/family.html>

Family Tree Magazine suggests 20 questions to begin developing your family stories <http://www.familytreemagazine.com/article/20-questions>

Other ideas: Use photos as a starting point (see pg. 18). Ask questions about how older members celebrated the birthdays of their children. How did early family gatherings compare with

those today? What are some of the most important changes you have seen in your lifetime? What was your first job and what prepared you for your career? What buildings were familiar to you as a youngster? Are the buildings still there? Who were your national heroes when you were young?

Linking Family History with World Events

Family History

What are the events that are important to you and your family? Make a list of these events with the dates. As you observe the public history on the adjacent page, you will understand how national and world events were part of your history.

Life Events

- Born
- School and leisure
- Teen years
- Relatives and friends
- Helping in the neighborhood
- First job and career
- Marriage
- Places lived: migration and moving experiences
- Children and grandchildren
- Historical events witnessed
- Memorable birthdays
- Aging and retirement
- Family gatherings
- Achievements and Failures

A family time line is a graphic organizer: you can see the history on one page. The timeline can begin with the birth of your grandparents or great-grandparents or great-great-grandparents. Include happy times: births, marriages, family moves, travels or adventures, achievements (graduation, a job, first home), as well as sad times: sad times (losing a job, illness, death, community disaster), and how your family members served by joining the military, participating in community action and volunteering.

Develop a time line with older relatives. Identify and reflect on the “stepping stones” of their lives. What are the dates for the big events, changes, tragedies, achievements, and key moments?

The best way to do a time line is to use a long rectangular paper, Draw a line down the middle and then start with your family events on one side and historical events on the other. (*History Comes Home*).

These historical events begin in 1900 to 2016. Your timeline can begin and end with whatever dates you choose. Include public history that is meaningful to you and your family.



*Each family history
is a tiny piece of mosaic
of the country's history.*
Alex Haley

Public History

- 1776 Declaration of Independence
- 1919 Influenza Pandemic ends
- 1920 Women can vote
- 1929 Stock market crashes
- 1935 Social Security Act
- 1941 Pearl Harbor: WWII
- 1946 Baby Boom begins
- 1950 Korean War
- 1955 Polio Vaccine
- 1964 Civil Rights Act
- 1965 Medicare and Medicaid
- 1969 First man on the moon
- 1974 President Nixon Resigns
- 1976 U.S. Bicentennial
- 1980 Mt. St. Helens Erupts
- 1989 Berlin Wall Falls
- 1991 Dessert Storm
- 1992 Hurricane Andrew
- 2001 Nine Eleven
- 2003 - Space Shuttle Columbia disaster
- 2003 - Invasion of Iraq
- 2004 - Facebook launched
- 2005 - YouTube launched
- 2005 - Hurricane Katrina
- 2007 - iPhone debuts
- 2009 - Obama sworn in as President
- 2015 - Brexit
- 2016 *What event would you list?*

Photos Are Stories

Photographs may be your key to getting started or to enriching your family history. As you look at the photos, label them with date, place, and the people in the photo. What are they doing? Where was the photo taken and under what circumstances? Who are the people and why are they together? How are they related to you?

This great-great-grandfather cuts into his 100th birthday cake and tells a story through the photograph. His great-great grandchildren might ask about the birthday celebration:

Who made the cake?
Who attended the party? What was the model of the car outside the window?
Who was driving the

car? Do you see the sign on the wall that could give a clue about where the party is being held? How many guests are attending? What other clues can you find in the photo?



Use photographs of events in your life and elaborate on who is in the picture, what they are doing, why they are there, and what was happening in your community, nation, and the world when the photo was taken.

1. The photo weaves a story.

- Who took the picture?
- Is there anything written on the front or back?
- Where did you find the photo?
- What is happening in the photo?

2. Explaining the photo

- Why was the photo taken?
- Does the photograph illustrate a theme, a historical period, or event?
- Divide the photo into several parts and look at them carefully.
For example: Look at the painting on the wall, the curtains, the hair styles, the license plate (what year?), the style of clothing, books on the bookshelf, the furniture, the view through the window.

3. Suggest a title and a caption that describes the photo. (Life Stories Preservation)



Storytelling



For thousands of years, storytelling has been key to passing history from generation to generation. Through oral history and storytelling, cultures were described and preserved.

In the Native American culture, children and grandchildren learned the tribal stories from their elders and passed them on to their

children and grandchildren. But in recent times there is greater emphasis on writing and recording the stories because the tribal languages are being lost.

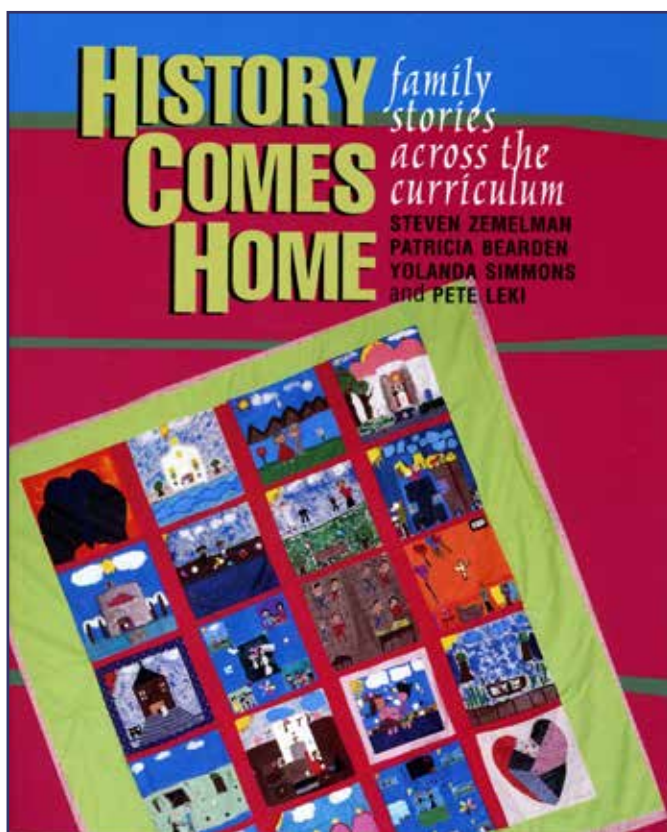
Storytelling is considered one of the oldest healing arts; it has been used for centuries as a beneficial way for grieving people to cope with loss. <http://www.journeyofhearts.org/kirstimd/tellstory.htm>

“All writers of the story are still storytellers sitting around the cave of the world.”

Paul Darcy Boles



Family Stories in the Classroom



Benefits for Learning

When a story is told by someone who has lived the history, learning comes alive!

Teachers and professors say that family stories fit across the curriculum, in English, math, science, social studies, geography, and more throughout the educational pipeline.

Students of all ages, from preschool through college and including older learners, can benefit from gathering and sharing their family stories.

In **geography** class, students find the places of origin of their ancestors on a world map. They find latitude and longitude, the continent, hemisphere and land regions of the given location. In **language arts**, after preparing questions for interviews with older family members, students practice interviewing with classmates. They collect the family stories and share written stories in a display and class scrapbook. In **math class** students produce a pie chart for analyzing and presenting the classroom profile. Students can



College students compare their stories about the depression after interviewing elder members of their families. The students wrote about eating popcorn and buttermilk, having two or three families together because homes were lost, and the humor that helped people survive.

A third-grade student tells about her display, including photos of ancestors and information about her ethnic profile. The teacher challenges students to reflect on their culture and ethnicity by asking questions of their parents and grandparents and older relatives.



calculate percentages, prepare graphs, make estimates, and prepare averages of information about the states or countries where their ancestors lived. During **History** class, students begin with the data from the classroom profile and begin investigating historical events – and the impact of a war, financial depression, or political upheaval on their family or the families of friends. In **Science** students look at the migration patterns and modes of transportation.

These activities fit with middle school, high school, college and for older learners. In fact, one of the most successful classes for 50+ students is Genealogy and oral history.

The rap musical Alexander Hamilton demonstrates that stories can be songs, pictures, plays, newscasts and the contents of social media.

Conversations with Veterans

Veterans are living historians who effortlessly enrich classroom discussions. Yolanda Simmons, a teacher from Chicago Public Schools says, “On Veterans Day, a Korean War veteran came to class to talk about his experiences. The students eagerly asked questions and then one of the students started a lively discussion when he said, “My grandfather fought in the Korean War and he didn’t come back.”



Simmons said that the comment brought an important teaching moment with a lively conversation about the Viet Nam War and the Iraq War, the geography of the wars and the public history as it related to family history. Simmons said,

“The class was energized as the students related personal stories about their families, friends and neighborhoods.”

Betsy Brown, a teacher at Lewis Elementary School in Carbondale teaches about WWII. The students plant a Victory Garden and then invite local veterans for a celebration. The students interview veterans and write scripts for plays about the experiences.



Service-Learning Projects

Students interview veterans and older community members as part of a service learning project. It is a win/win proposition. Students help elders preserve their history and the elders give students an opportunity to practice interviewing, writing, and to become historians and reporters.

Part of the service-learning experience is reflection and preparing a journal. One student reported that his great-great grandfather kept a journal for five years when he was a P.O.W. He said, “ It helped him endure the experience and gave him hope. All of these documents, letters, and journals are part of our family history.” See Resources on pgs. 30-31 for additional information about interviewing veterans from the Library of Congress, the Illinois State Library and the Illinois Council for the Social Studies.

Serving Those Who Served is a day of service created to thank service men and women, our veterans, and their families.

During November 2016, people throughout Illinois will spend the day engaged in volunteer service projects focused on benefiting our heroes.



This is an ideal time to gather a story from a local veteran and join in a volunteer activity for veterans. For a toolkit and additional information: <https://www.illinois.gov/veterans/Documents/STWSToolKit2016.pdf>

When a story is told by someone who has lived the history, it comes alive!

All generations benefit from gathering and sharing their family stories. Shannon Wimberly from southern Illinois, recalls a class assignment. “When I was 9, I had an assignment to write about Charlie Berger, the infamous gangster who was in cahoots with the mob in Chicago and part of the Bloody Williamson massacre.

“I settled in my usual position on the floor and told my grandmother that I was writing about Charlie Byrd. I was astounded when said, ‘I knew Charlie Byrd, He was very nice to me.’ She said that she was a waitress at the Carterville Café when she was 16 years old and that Byrd often came in with his gang. ‘They were good looking, dressed nice, and tipped real good.’”

Wimberly says, “When you are young, you think 20 years is forever, and don’t make a connection to history,” but when a story is told by someone who has lived the history, it comes alive.”

Becoming a Family Historian



A student is delighted when her research results with information about the migration of her ancestors from Louisiana to Chicago. She consulted some primary sources to find the communities that comprised their migration path.

Research the Story

Every historian is a detective especially when establishing the accuracy and the original purpose of the documents about their family history. To be a good history detective you must look for clues to help put the record into its original context. (History Handbook for Student Research Projects). Some of the other suggestions for documenting family history:

1. Include details. Stories have more impact from a historical viewpoint when they contain names, dates, places, people and what happened. What was the name of the school; how old were the people in the photo; what were their names; who owned the store; what was the weather?
2. Relive the memory. What do you recall – colors, sounds, smells? Who was there at the time? What happened? Why? What were you thinking and feeling?
3. Preserving the history of an individual, a society, a culture to pass on life experiences and lessons through your stories. What was happening in the world and your community when the story was happening?
4. Include memorabilia: photographs, maps or drawings of the house, the ice box, the dress, or neighborhood; excerpts from letters, a diary, or journal; copies of newspaper clippings, awards, newsletters, cartoons, and so forth. (Life Stories Preservation)

Starting a Journal



You may think that no one would be interested in your life, but think about your family in 50 or 100 years. They will wonder about your hobbies and work, your experiences in school, your attitudes about the important things in life, and

who you were. You can start a journal at any age--to prepare your history for generations yet to come.

When Mary Henderson turned 70, her granddaughter asked about her experiences when she was a teenager.

That curiosity led Mary to write her family history. She started with her first her family's to Montana where they set up a homestead. Mary continued writing about school days, challenges as a teen, and stories that her parents, grandparents, aunts and uncles had told her. She continued to update the history every year until just before her death. She left a beautiful legacy for her family — one they will cherish and pass on to their children and grandchildren.



Journals of Lewis and Clark

The Journals of the Lewis and Clark Expedition provide precise historical information about the Corps of Discovery from 1803 to 1806. The mandate to keep their journals came from President Thomas Jefferson, who wrote they "are directed each to keep a separate journal from day to day of all passing accuracies..."

Resources

In the library and on the Internet you will find vast resources about recording, writing and sharing your stories. If you are interested in Genealogy, online resources are plentiful for tracking and recording family histories. Likewise your local public library is a treasure trove for historians of all ages.

Illinois Council for the Social Studies

Storytelling in the Classroom

www.storyarts.org/classroom/roots/family.html

Collecting Family Stories

<http://www.learnnc.org/lp/pages/3657>

Telling Family Stories

www.boydsmillspress.com/PDFs/TellingFamilyStories.pdf

Learning Page for American History

<http://memory.loc.gov/ammem/ndlpedu/index.html>

National History Day

<https://www.nhd.org/>

Illinois History Day

<https://www.illinois.gov/ihpa/Involved/Students/Pages/default.aspx>

Preserving Lifetime Memories

<http://www.lifetimememoriesandstories.com/>

Oral History: Abraham Lincoln Presidential Library <https://www.illinois.gov/ALPLM/LIBRARY/COLLECTIONS/ORALHISTORY/Pages/default.aspx>

Storytelling: Circle of Stories

<http://www.pbs.org/circleofstories/educators/>

Illinois State Historical Society

<http://www.historyillinois.org/>

Benefits of Telling the Story, Journey of Hearts, University of California Berkeley Extension. <http://www.journeyofhearts.org/kirstimd/tellstory.htm>

Books

Danzer, Gerald A. (1991) A History Handbook for Student Research Projects.
Springfield: Illinois State Historical Society

Wolfman, Ira. (1986) Do People Grow on Family Trees? Genealogy for Kids & Other
Beginners, New York: Workman Publishing Co.

Zemelman, S., Bearden, P., and all. (1990). History Comes Home: Family Stories across
the Curriculum, York, Maine: Stenhouse Publishers

The Library of Congress Veterans History Program

Collect a veteran's historical documents. Collaborate with your local high schools and universities, retirement communities, veteran service organizations, churches, area businesses, and other community groups. All you need is the VHP Field Kit, an interviewer, and an interviewee. Once the interview is recorded, keep a copy for yourself and submit the original along with the required forms to VHP.

<https://www.loc.gov/vets/pdf/brochure-august2013.pdf>

Illinois Partners with the Library of Congress

Library of Congress, American Folk Life Center

www.loc.gov/folklife

Illinois State Library: Office of Secretary of State

Illinois Veterans History Project

<https://www.cyberdriveillinois.com/departments/library/public/veteransproject.html>

Illinois Principals Association

Illinois Veterans and Community Classroom Project

<http://ilvets.ltc.k12.il.us/ilvets/LearningResources/StudentsasHistorians.aspx>

On History Day at the Illinois Capitol, students report on interviews with older family members, parents, relatives, neighbors and civic officials.



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